

The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents the Exhibition “Currents and Constellations: Black Art in Focus”

News Release

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Display of work by Black artists who embrace and challenge art history

Cleveland (February 22, 2022) — *Currents and Constellations: Black Art in Focus* features nine thematic groupings of works by Black artists, five in the Julia and Larry Pollock Focus Gallery and four in the permanent collection galleries. The exhibition places Black American art and artists at the center of discussions about the relevance of art history to contemporary practice. Works from the Cleveland Museum of Art’s (CMA) permanent collection and significant loans are presented in conversation, exploring the ways emerging and mid-career Black artists embrace and challenge art history. On display are works by Sanford Biggers, Elizabeth Catlett, Richard Hunt, Dawoud Bey, Lorna Simpson, Jack Whitten, Darius Steward, Kenturah Davis, Mario Moore and Torkwase Dyson, among others. ***Currents and Constellations***, a free exhibition, is on view through June 26, 2022.

“***Currents and Constellations*** features a series of thematic vignettes that emphasize how Black artists have drawn from conventional art historical narratives to generate new ones,” said William M. Griswold, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. “The exhibition creates conversations among contemporary art and historical objects in our encyclopedic collection, inviting visitors to bring their own interpretations to these multifaceted objects.”

In the exhibition, “currents and constellations” is used as a navigational phrase that helps visitors explore the meanings of complex artworks, especially those that engage histories suppressed or erased from conventional narratives. The phrase marks both direct art historical links, or currents, which represent connections supported by written or recorded archival research, and indirect connections, or *constellations*, which represent what’s missing from an archive or account. Together, “currents and constellations” describes the interpretive potential of an artwork. The exhibition’s nine thematic groupings illuminate some of the ways that Black artists address essential perspectives, questions and ideas.

“Through multiple, overlapping themes, visitors are encouraged to consider the vast network of relations borne of a single artwork, to experience the ways that Blackness, broadly speaking, may impact an

artist's process or content and to see challenging artworks as an invitation to delve more deeply," said Key Jo Lee, director of academic affairs and associate curator of special projects.

The thematic groupings in the focus gallery include **Black Cartographies**, where each artwork uniquely maps Black experiences and histories; **Turning Away** and **Turning Toward**, both of which engage the history of portraiture; **The Sacred Mundane**, featuring works by artists who show how what they cherish might seem common or mundane; and **Resistance in Black & White**, where artists address different forms of oppression.

The four groupings in the permanent collection galleries generate new conversations with works in other parts of the CMA's collection, including American painting and sculpture, Abstract Expressionism, German Expressionism and contemporary art.

Companion Publication

Perceptual Drift: Black Art and an Ethics of Looking is a companion publication written by Key Jo Lee, director of academic affairs and associate curator of special projects, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and PhD candidate, Yale University; Christina Sharpe, professor, Department of Humanities, York University, Toronto; Robin Coste Lewis, poet laureate of Los Angeles; and Erica Moiah James, assistant professor, art history, University of Miami.

The publication offers a new interpretive model drawing on four key works of Black art in the Cleveland Museum of Art's collection. Each chapter is a case study for leading Black academics in different disciplines to challenge the limits of canonical art history rooted in social and racial inequality. The publication seeks to transform how art history is written, introduce readers to complex objects and theoretical frameworks, illuminate meanings and untold histories, open new entry points into Black art and publicize content on Black art acquired by the CMA.

Perceptual Drift: Black Art and an Ethics of Looking is published by the CMA and distributed by Yale University Press. It will be available for purchase this summer [online](#) ^[1] or at the Cleveland Museum of Art store for \$45.

Complementary Programming

Write-In with Literary Cleveland: Writing Inspired by Black Art ^[2]

Saturday, March 26, noon–4 p.m.

Meet in the Ames Family Atrium

FREE; ticket required

Fuel your writing with inspiration from Black art.

Explore the works in *Currents and Constellations: Black Art in Focus* ^[3] through a variety of writing prompts and activities with *Literary Cleveland* ^[4]. CMA curator Key Jo Lee will be on hand to answer questions.

Open Call: If you are interested in participating in “Represent: Writing Inspired by Black Art,” Literary Cleveland and the CMA are accepting submissions through April 11. Submit your writing [here](#) [5].

Represent: Writing Inspired by Black Art [6]

Friday, May 20, 7 p.m.

Gartner Auditorium

FREE; ticket required

Spend your evening at the CMA with [Literary Cleveland](#) [4], as writers share work that reflects on Black art and its expansive possibilities.

Enjoy readings inspired by the key themes of and the works in *[Currents and Constellations: Black Art in Focus](#)* [3], which puts art from the CMA's permanent collection in conversation with a vanguard of emerging and mid-career Black artists who explore the fundamentals of art making, embracing and challenging art history.

Open Call: If you are interested in participating, Literary Cleveland and the CMA are accepting submissions through April 11. Submit your writing [here](#) [5].

For more information about and images for ***Currents and Constellations: Black Art in Focus***, please view the [press kit](#) [7].

Currents and Constellations: Black Art in Focus is made possible with support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

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*Deceased

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top

comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [8].

Press Announcements [9]

Source URL: <https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit/cleveland-museum-art-presents-exhibition-currents-and-constellations-black-art-in-focus>

Links

[1] <https://shop.clevelandart.org/> [2] <https://www.clevelandart.org/events/special-events/write-literary-cleveland-writing-inspired-black-art> [3] <https://www.clevelandart.org/exhibitions/currents-and-constellations-black-art-focus> [4] <https://www.litcleveland.org/> [5] <https://gordonsquarereview.submittable.com/submit/218027/lit-cle-cma-represent-writing-inspired-by-black-art> [6] <https://www.clevelandart.org/events/special-events/represent-writing-inspired-black-art> [7] https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xaa66kwpvfb1iv5/AAAs6U0FQhq_mtWj5Z7-mDXKa?dl=0 [8] <https://www.clevelandart.org> [9] <https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit>